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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social
Development: Review of relevant United
Nations plans and programmes of action
pertaining to the situation of social groups**

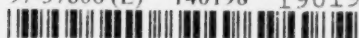
**Options for the future review and appraisal of the
implementation of the International Plan of Action
on Ageing**

Report of the Secretary-General

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* E/CN.5/1998/1.



I. Introduction

1. The Commission for Social Development, in its resolution 35/1,¹ expressed its concern that the number of countries responding to the questionnaire for the review and appraisal of the implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing had declined. The Commission was also concerned that the findings of the review and appraisal exercises had consistently shown that, although modest progress had been made, implementation remained a largely incomplete task, particularly in developing countries. It has, therefore, invited the Secretary-General to make recommendations on different options for the future review and appraisal of the implementation of the Plan of Action and requested the Secretary-General to report on the implementation of the resolution to the Commission at its thirty-sixth session, under an agenda item entitled "Review of relevant United Nations plans and programmes of action pertaining to the situation of social groups".

2. The present report has been prepared to assist the Commission in considering possible options for conducting the future review and appraisal exercises. It takes into account different views expressed by delegations during the thirty-fifth session of the Commission when conducting the fourth review and appraisal as well as opinions of experts approached by the Secretariat in the course of the preparation of the report.

II. International Plan of Action on Ageing and related documents

3. The International Plan of Action on Ageing, the first international consensus document on the subject of ageing, was adopted by the World Assembly on Ageing in 1982² and endorsed the same year by the General Assembly, in resolution 37/51. In its 62 recommendations, the Plan suggests action in seven areas of concern to ageing individuals — health and nutrition, protection of elderly consumers, housing and environment, family, social welfare, income security and employment, and education. In order to promote policies and programmes on ageing, the Plan recommends that international action, both multilateral and bilateral, should focus on data collection and analysis, training and education, and research. It includes references to lifelong individual development, multigenerational relationships and the interplay of population ageing and development.

4. In 1991, the General Assembly, in resolution 46/91, adopted the United Nations Principles for Older Persons. The 18 principles are based on the International Plan of Action on Ageing and aim at promoting the independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity of older persons.

5. In order to provide a pragmatic focus for the broad and ideal goals of the Plan of Action during the second decade of its implementation, a practical strategy on ageing was developed in 1992.³ The strategy consists of eight global targets on ageing for the year 2001 and 38 suggested national targets on ageing. The national targets are based on the areas of concern outlined in the Plan of Action. The global targets were subsequently adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 47/86.

6. All three international instruments on ageing have had the situation of older persons as their primary focus for both national and international action on ageing. While the Plan of Action and the Principles for Older Persons serve as policy statements and frameworks for policy interventions, the targets set out practical measures for facilitating the implementation of the Plan of Action and the Principles at the global, national and community levels.

7. The first decade, and indeed the first phase, of the United Nations action on ageing was concluded in 1992 with the adoption of the Proclamation on Ageing.⁴ In the Proclamation, Member States declared their commitment to supporting the implementation of the Plan of Action and the Principles through national and global initiatives and decided to observe the year 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons.

8. The traditional United Nations focus on the situation of older persons has been maintained in the preparations for the Year but has now been broadened by three other considerations. In his report on the conceptual framework of a programme for the preparation and observance in 1999 of the International Year of Older Persons (A/50/114) and in his subsequent operational framework for the Year (A/52/328), the Secretary-General suggested four subject areas for exploration, debate and action:

- (a) The situation of older persons;
- (b) Lifelong individual development;
- (c) Multigenerational relationships;
- (d) The relationship between development and the ageing of populations.

These four subject areas constitute the main pillars of a society for all ages, the theme of the International Year.

They may also assist in elaborating a multidimensional long-term strategy on ageing for the first decades of the twenty-first century, as outlined in the operational framework.

III. Monitoring the implementation of international policy documents on ageing

9. A procedure for monitoring the implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing was among the Plan's recommendations. The Commission for Social Development is the intergovernmental body designated to review the implementation of the Plan of Action every four years and to make proposals for updating it, as necessary. Replies to a periodically updated questionnaire have been the main source of information. The findings of the review exercise are transmitted through the Economic and Social Council to the General Assembly for consideration.⁵ The Department of Economic and Social Affairs, of the United Nations Secretariat, was requested to provide periodic reports on progress made within the United Nations system in achieving the goals and objectives of the Plan. This monitoring procedure was affirmed by the General Assembly in its resolution 37/51.

10. In its resolution 42/51, the General Assembly reaffirmed its endorsement of the Plan and requested the Secretary-General, through the Commission for Social Development, to continue to monitor progress in its implementation through the quadrennial review and appraisal process.

11. Although no special procedure for monitoring the implementation of the United Nations Principles for Older Persons has been outlined, specific inquiries have been made, starting with the third review and appraisal of the Plan of Action, in 1992, regarding Governments' promulgation of the Principles and adoption of related legislation on the rights of older persons.

12. Evaluation of the targets in the practical strategy is ongoing.³ The eight global targets have been integrated into the operational framework for 1999. The suggested national targets are organized in accordance with the priority areas outlined in the Plan of Action; thus, progress in reaching them can be found in the corresponding chapters of the periodic reports on the Plan's implementation — specifically, in the third and the fourth review and appraisal reports.

13. All four appraisals of the implementation of the Plan of Action noted three persistent tendencies: the world's aged population continues to grow, as does awareness of this unprecedented demographic phenomenon and its numerous implications for individuals and society. Secondly, global and national responses have not kept pace with the ageing of populations. Population ageing is most rapid in developing countries.

14. Thirdly, the number of countries responding to the questionnaire on which the review and appraisal exercise is based has been low. The relevant figures are as follows: first review and appraisal (1984) — 77 countries; second (1988) — 58 countries; third (1992) — 81 countries; fourth (1996) — 55 countries.

15. Thus on average, fewer than half of the Member States responded to the inquiry. Only 12 countries responded to all four questionnaires: Bahrain, Burkina Faso, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Jamaica, Japan, Oman, Slovakia, Spain and Turkey. This has made assessment of overall progress difficult.

16. The reasons for low participation in the monitoring exercise of the International Plan may be both substantive and procedural. The substantive reasons relate to the fundamental changes that have taken place in both developed and developing countries in the 15 years since the Plan's adoption. New categories of countries have emerged, including the countries in transition from the centrally planned economies and the rapidly industrializing countries. Specific issues relating to the situation of older persons in those countries as well as in developing countries may require special policy responses that differ from those taken by a traditional developed country.

17. The Plan of Action is, however, a well recognized and well written document. It has been incorporated into national plans by 52 of the 55 countries that reported having national plans. It provides for updating, as necessary. In resolution 35/1, the Commission for Social Development recommended that the United Nations Principles for Older Persons be annexed to future publications of the Plan.

18. Procedurally, low participation rates may arise from the fact that the review and appraisal is a self-reporting and voluntary exercise and not an independent evaluation of the impact of policy interventions. Moreover, interpretations of the questions vary greatly among States. The differences in interpretation are not apparent in the responses and consequently are not discussed in the review documents.

19. The most recent revision of the questionnaire was made in 1992 for the third and subsequent appraisals. It was designed to obtain quantifiable data in machine-readable form and, as a result, to capture the dynamics of policy interventions on ageing. Unfortunately this approach has proved to be impractical, since interpretations are inconsistent and since the group of responding countries has changed with each review, making progress and comparability difficult to assess.

20. Most of the above-mentioned dynamics of the review and appraisal process were noted by the Commission for Social Development while conducting the fourth review and appraisal at its thirty-fifth session, in 1997.⁶ The Commission, in its resolution 35/1, invited the Secretary-General to make recommendations on different options for future review and appraisal of the implementation of the Plan of Action.

IV. Options for future monitoring of the implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing

21. The most radical option for promoting implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing by Member States and for improving its review and appraisal would be the revision of the Plan of Action in order to adjust it to recent socio-economic and political realities. Such an option would imply embarking on extensive intergovernmental negotiations.

22. A more manageable and immediate approach would be to maintain the Plan's primary focus on the situation of older persons but accompany it by complementary strategies for lifelong individual development, multigenerational relationships, and for examining more thoroughly the relationship between development and the ageing of populations. This could be achieved in the process of elaborating a perspective plan on ageing to the year 2020, as proposed in the Secretary-General's operational framework for 1999 and beyond.⁷

23. Priority areas within a 2020 perspective plan could be selected for periodic assessment by the Commission for Social Development. The assessments, to be based on brief, well defined questionnaires, could be expanded in the reports on the world ageing situation, mandated for publication every six years.⁸ Combining these two activities would give depth to the review and appraisal process and breadth to the reports. Should this complementarity be agreed upon, it is

suggested that both activities occur in the same year — possibly every five years, beginning in 2005.

24. The review and appraisal process could be facilitated by establishing a permanent database on the Internet of public policies on ageing, enabling continuous updating and access by Member States. Such a ready reference would facilitate policy formulation and international exchange of information in the years between reviews.

25. Household surveys could also support the review and appraisal process by enabling selected hypotheses to be tested in selected geographical areas. Household surveys tend to be costly, and cross-national comparability of results is difficult, but they could be employed selectively when resources are available.

26. Another supporting initiative to be explored is the elaboration of an ageing-related development index (ADI), similar to the gender-related development index (GDI) introduced to complement the human development index (HDI) of the *Human Development Report*.⁹ Certain ageing-specific indicators are already widely used — life expectancy (at birth and at age 60), dependency ratios, retirement ages, adult literacy rates, morbidity trends, use of long-term care facilities and, in some places, statistics on active ageing showing the extent of older persons' contributions to the socio-economic and cultural development of communities and their roles in the maintenance of families.

27. It is proposed, therefore, that the review and appraisal process continue as follows:

- (a) Every five years beginning in 2005;
 - (b) Complemented by a report on the world ageing situation in the following year;
 - (c) Focused on priority areas of the 2020 perspective plan (closely related to the Plan of Action), to be identified by the Commission for Social Development.
28. Additionally, the review and appraisal could be supported by the following three related initiatives, as resources become available to make them possible:
- (a) A database of policies and programmes on the Internet;
 - (b) Selected household surveys;
 - (c) An ageing-related development index (ADI).

29. The review and appraisal process remains an important tool for assessing the relevance of the Plan of Action in newly evolving socio-economic conditions, for determining trends regionally and worldwide in ageing policies and

programmes, for identifying innovations and good practices, for stimulating interest in and awareness of the ageing process, and for assisting Governments and civil society in adjusting their thinking and practical strategies to changing demographic situations.

30. Thus the review and appraisal process should be maintained but adjusted incrementally. The incremental adjustments outlined above would make the process more relevant to emerging socio-economic realities, could generate more interest in participating in the process, and might, relatedly, help promote more effective implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing in all world regions.

Notes

¹ *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1997, Supplement No. 6 (E/1997/26), chap. I, sect. D*

² See *Report of the World Assembly on Ageing, Vienna, 26 July to 6 August 1982* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E 82.1.16)

³ See A/47/339.

⁴ General Assembly resolution 47/5, annex.

⁵ The first review and appraisal was conducted by the Commission in 1984-1985 (E/1985/6 and Corr. 1), the second in 1988-1989 (E/1989/13), the third in 1992-1993 (E/CN.5/1993/7), and the fourth in 1996-1997 (E/CN.5/1997/4).

⁶ See E/CN.5/1997/4.

⁷ A/52/328, sect. III.

⁸ General Assembly resolution 41/96.

⁹ Published annually by the United Nations Development Programme.